

Matthew 2:1-12

2In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.” ’

7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Today we have experienced an epiphany, the light of God’s love, the birth of God’s son portrayed by our children through the epiphany pageant. Yet this epiphany is more than just precious moments of children sharing the story of Christ birth, it is a moment when we see the reality that lives are changed. How many of you were in a Christmas pageant past or present? Those watching light up and the children light up. The children will remember the story because they became part of it. Last week as we rehearsed for today, Jackson reminded me that last year they walked back and forth across this sanctuary as Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem. Epiphanies are life changing.

The journey of the magi, or Epiphany, is an ancient Christian celebration, dating at least as far back as the 300’s. Today is the actual feast day of Epiphany, which is also, if you count it up, the 12th Day of Christmas. This word epiphany comes to us almost directly from the Greek: “**Epi**”, meaning ‘on’ or ‘upon’, and “**phaneros**”, which means ‘visible’ or ‘apparent’.

An epiphany is more than just an “aha!” moment. An epiphany is something that is *revealed* to you; something where light shines and makes something clear. The magi received this epiphany for all of us. They saw God made flesh and saw salvation for all people. But they weren’t the only ones to have an epiphany. Everyone who encountered this baby had an epiphany, even King Herod.

If you have an epiphany, but your life goes on as before, you might question how much of an epiphany it really was; because epiphanies aren’t just learning new things. It is important to learn new things. The wise men had been studying the star charts, and had been reading prophecies, so they were prepared when they saw the star, and were equipped to follow it.

While God can make Godself apparent to people in many ways, for the magi, they were present for the epiphany, for the revelation of Jesus as savior of the world, because they’d been preparing for it and because they had eyes open to see it.

And while the magi studied and prepared so that they’d be in the right place for the epiphany, they did more than just study. If looking at their star charts was all they did, they wouldn’t have seen Jesus. They had to leave their telescopes and go on a journey. Studying the Word prepares you to go out and encounter the Word in the world.

And the magi encountered quite a bit. They left Persia and journeyed to Jerusalem. They met King Herod. They went to Bethlehem, where they, like the shepherds in Luke, saw the star stopped over the family and they bowed down and worshiped him. Persian astrologers bowing down before a poor Hebrew baby, quite a change, I would imagine, from their routine.

But, of course, the epiphany was only the beginning of the changes for the magi. And not all changes are easy. The epiphany of a child born as king in Bethlehem shook the palace in Jerusalem. The world responds when God breaks into the world—and it isn’t always peaceful. Matthew follows visit of the Magi with the slaughter of the innocent children. The magi were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, so they left for their own country by another road. But Matthew doesn’t say what happened next for the magi.

Did they make it home? And if they did make it home, what was it like to return to their routine?

Imagine parking your camel in the garage, and walking into the house. Everything looks the same, but you’re not, after traveling the world. Your spouse is ready for you to take out the trash, cook a meal and do the other chores that were left with while you traveled, but you’ve followed a star and it led you to a child. And you felt God’s presence in this baby. You offered your gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to his mother, and you saw the look of confusion in her eyes as she wondered what all of this is about.

And you know the world is not the same. But you feel alone in that knowledge. Everyone else wants you to return to life as usual. But you can't. You've just ridden on a camel for months, fleeing King Herod. Had you not gone to him, asking him where you could worship the king, those babies would still be alive. Life is NOT "usual", any more.

This infant God has changed the world, has changed you. And you can't pretend it didn't happen. Epiphany is about God coming to us in ways we can't unchange. We can never see the world again the same way. We don't know what happened to the magi after they went home by another way, but we do know that once you encounter Jesus, you travel on different roads.

And while they had prepared for their epiphany, and had set out to see it, I bet they didn't expect what actually happened. Did they? Had they been looking for Jesus in a manger, would they have gone to Herod first, seeking a king? Even when we're seeking God, we rarely seem to find what we expect. But here's a problem with epiphanies. They don't always translate.

The magi had to flee King Herod for their lives when he heard the epiphany. So epiphanies aren't something you can give to others. People need to have their own experience of the Divine.

The most the magi could do was tell people what they'd seen. The most we can do is live our lives reflecting the light of the star that has shined on us, hoping it will shed light for someone who finds themselves in darkness.

Where do you find yourself this Epiphany? Maybe, you've done the work and you're actively seeking God. Maybe you've already had your epiphany and you feel lonely, because others just don't know how it feels to be so different even though you look just the same.

Wherever we are, individually, in the midst of this journey, I'm grateful we are here together to help each other along the way. We recognize our faith is a personal experience, but that doesn't make it a private one.

We share together today our children's portrayal of Jesus's birth and the epiphanies of those who encountered him; Mary and Joseph, shepherd and sheep, King Herod and the magi that first Christmas. We come together today to sing songs of praise and offer the prayers of our heart that God might shine light on our lives and the world. We come together today, confessing that are not prepared nor are our eyes open to the in breaking of God's light in all times and places. We come together today to break bread and share the cup at the God's table taking into our bodies the light of the world to be that light ...so when we leave the light will shine before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to God in heaven. We come today seeking God's star light to shine in our lives so that we might be God's starlight to the world.

I'd like to close with a poem by Ann Weems, called [Star Giving](#).

What I'd really like to give you for Christmas

is a star...

Brilliance in a package,

Something you could keep in the pocket of your jeans

or in the pocket of your being.

Something to take out in times of darkness,

Something that would never snuff out or tarnish,

Something you could hold in your hand,

Something for wonderment

Something for pondering,

Something that would remind you of

what Christmas has always meant:

God's Advent Light into the Darkness of this World.

But Stars are only God's for giving,

and I must be content to give you words and wishes

and packages without stars

But I can wish you life

as radiant as the Star

that announced the Christ Child's coming,

and as filled with awe as the shepherds who stood

beneath its light.

And I can pass on to you the love

that has been give to me,

ignited countless times by others

who have knelt in Bethlehem's light.

Perhaps, if you ask, perhaps if you seek, God will give you a star.

Amen!

Poem: "Epiphany" by Macrina Wiederkehr, O.S.B.

Creator of the Stars

God of Epiphanies

You are the Great Star

You have marked my path with light

You have filled my sky with stars, naming each star, guiding it, until it shines into my heart, awakening me to deeper seeing, new revelations, and brighter epiphanies.

O Infinite Star Giver,

I now ask for wisdom and courage to follow these stars for their names are many and my heart is fearful.

They shine on me wherever I go: the Star of Hope, the Star of Mercy and Compassion, the Star of Justice and Peace, the Star of Tenderness and Love, the Star of Suffering, the Star of Joy.

And every time I feel the shine, I am called to follow it, to sing it, to live it, all the way to the cross and beyond.

O Creator of the Stars,

You have become within me an unending Epiphany.

Season of Your Heart: Prayers and Reflections, pp. 53-54.